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Bringing Joy to Teaching and Learning through a Pedagogy of Play

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Abstract

Teaching and learning in higher education today means navigating mental health challenges, socio-political and economic stressors, and the evolving landscape of generative AI. Students and faculty alike need opportunities for connection, movement, creativity, and flexible learning. Despite perceived incompatibility of “play” with adult education and academic rigor (Portnoy & Baecher, 2024), the pedagogy of play offers a research-backed approach to foster curiosity, resilience, and authentic engagement to create post-secondary learning environments that feel safe, joyful, and meaningful (Leather et.al., 2020; Robson & LeVoguer, 2024). Pedagogy of play or playful learning can encompass a variety of intentional, holistic, and student-centred, pedagogical approaches that integrate playfulness (Heidari-Shahreza, 2024). This presentation invites participants to explore ways to adopt a pedagogy of play to foster creative, affirming, inquiry-based, and fun learning in their teaching contexts. The facilitators will engage participants in playful learning and innovative thinking to address barriers to “play” in their discipline/context. They will offer a range of ideas for incorporating play to scaffold a structured small group activity, and curate a co-created resource to share out post presentation.

Keywords: Creative, Engaging, Flexible-Thinking, Innovative, Inquiry-Based